

US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE – SOUTHWEST REGION
HURRICANE RITA UPDATE AS OF September 25, 2005 – 16 00 HOURS MDST

ITEMS OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Until further notice Central Command briefings at 0830 and the conference calls at 0900 will continue between the Regional Office, the Incident Command Team and those Field Stations that received direct impact from the Hurricane.

Project leaders and supervisors reporting today had accounted for all of their employees during evacuations and have begun that process as facilities either reopen on Monday or later in the week. Circumstances in areas may delay employees returning safely -- those on the conference call were asked to get a list of the unaccounted employees to the Hurricane Rita Desk

The major impacts from Rita appear to be over as she has moved swiftly to the northeast. Hot and steamy weather is occurring with somewhat cooler temperatures expected later in the week and more rain in the future forecast. Flooding concerns have lessened, however Trinity's levee and the dam at Lake Livingston are being closely watched.

Ralph Godfrey's FWS Type-3 Incident Command Team has located its Incident Command Post (ICP) at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge southeast of Houston. There are 40 Service personnel and one US Forest Service member providing overhead support. The team liaison is making contacts with state and county officials to assist in determining appropriate missions and assignments.

The Team's priorities are to insure employee's safe return to their homes and facilities by assessing damages and making temporary repairs, provide community assistance by opening up vehicle access to emergency facilities and to open up Refuge Facilities and provide security.

Employees must make requests for assistance through the Team who will then place the request to the Hurricane Rita Dispatch Desk for coordination. All personnel support, boats, vehicles, equipment and supplies are to be requested and assigned through the system.

Facilities west of Houston are ready to reopen on Monday as well as the Clear Lake Ecological Services Office. Conditions at McFaddin and Texas Point National Wildlife Refuges are yet to be determined. Damage assessment is ongoing as the Team and staffs get access.

Fuel shortages, downed power lines, storm debris, phone outages and highway access continue to cause concern.

Refuges and fish hatcheries not impacted by the storm are ready to provide equipment, supplies and personnel support as needed. Coordination with Region 4 continues, as well as standby offers of assistance from Region 6.

USGS is conducting flyovers of the coastal areas for the Department and a tentatively scheduled flyover by R-2 may occur sometime next week.

Regional Director Dale Hall reminded everyone to be alert to the hazards left behind by Rita and that their safety was foremost. "I want to thank everyone for all that you've done and will be doing during this emergency."

INFORMATION ACCESS:

INTERNET:

Anyone seeking information on Hurricane Rita may do so via these Service links:

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/> <http://www.fws.gov/>

THE SOUTHWEST REGION'S HURRICANE RITA EMERGENCY INFORMATION DESK:

Employees can now reach the Southwest Region's Command Center's Hurricane Rita Emergency Information Desk by e-mail or text messaging at: hurricanerita@fws.gov

TELEPHONE:

The Emergency Information Desk is being staffed at the Regional Office through Sunday, September 25 -- hours of operation are from 0600 to 1800 daily. Initially the Desk is serving as a centralized communications base for all affected staff and offices and following landfall serve as a resource Dispatch Center.

***HURRICANE RITA EMERGENCY INFORMATION DESK PHONE NUMBER:
505-248-6508**

Employees may check for pre-recorded information on the hurricane by phoning the Region's 24-Hour Emergency Phone Line at:

***24-Hour Employee Emergency Hotline: 505-248-6543**

NOTE: Any media inquiries will be handled by External Affairs: 505-248-6911

Daily updates will be completed by COB each day and press releases issued as necessary.

END OF REPORT